

August 27, 1969

Miss Diane B. Sheahan  
Executive Administrative Officer  
The Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation  
Suite 510, 719 Thirteenth Street, N.W.  
Washington, d. C. 20005

Dear Miss Sheahan:

Dr. Kretchmer asked me, a few days ago, to respond to your letter of August 8. I will do my best to give some useful information, without attempting to make a polished reply in elegant form. As it happens, this comes at a rather awkward time to do justice to your request, for I am just about to leave for my own two-week vacation; Dr. Shooter has been attending a neurobiology workshop in Colorado, then en route to meetings in Europe; and Dr. Kretchmer is on his way to some WHO Committee meetings in Geneva.

It may also be important for you to know that Dr. Kretchmer has taken a new Chair of Human Developmental Biology, to be based in a laboratory at the Children's Convalescent Hospital. Dr. Herbert Schwartz, who specializes in hematology and the biochemistry of hemoglobin, is Acting Head of Pediatrics, pending an active search for a new head. We were also very sad to lose Professor McKhann to his well-deserved post at Johns Hopkins, and it will be a difficult task to replace him. His laboratory program was the principal single beneficiary of Foundation support funds; but it would be simplest were you to address him directly for a report on his recent research activities.

I have, however, assembled a few items that will illustrate the research activities of Professor Luzzati in Pediatrics, and of Professor Shooter and other members of this department, indicating progress within the facilities of the Kennedy Laboratories for Molecular Medicine.

I am also including some writings in the sphere of public information that are attempts to put the issue of "manipulating" the intelligence of the newborn in better perspective. I also bring to your attention a prospectus for a new undergraduate program in Human Biology whose relevance for the deeper understanding of mental retardation should be apparent.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg

In confidence:

Finally, I must mention that Visiting Professor L. L. Cavalli-Sforza has been conducting some exciting experiments on the transplantation of brain cells from normal to newborn recipient mice suffering from various neurological defects. I must ask, however, that this not be publicized in any way until the significance of these experiments has been firmly established as a matter of scientific evidence. Obviously, the implications of this line of work could easily be exaggerated and distorted, and I would want to be in a position to discuss them circumspectly and with deeper factual background before they reached any wider public attention. Nevertheless, Ambassador and Mrs. Shriver may be interested in my personal judgment that this represents a most exciting new approach to the investigation of brain defects; I do not venture to comment at this stage on any therapeutic applications. The issue need not at all be confined to genetic defects, since one could also use this approach (if it is indeed successful) to study just what happens to, and can be done to facilitate the recovery of, brain cells that have been damaged by malnutrition, virus infection or other injury. Most important of all, of course, is the opening up of a new technique to study the normal differentiation of the brain.

Joshua Lederberg